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GROUP 3724 PERSONNEL: THE DOCUMENT TO FOLLOW IS A

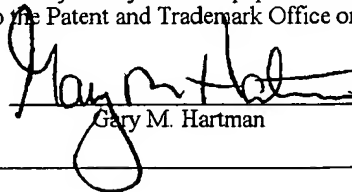
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COMMUNICATION
AFTER FINAL

for consideration in U.S. Application Serial No. 10/072,494

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Gary M. Hartman

December 10, 2003
Date

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PATENT

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Application No. :	10/072,494	Confirmation No. 3370
Applicant :	Brent L. Bucks	
Filed:	February 4, 2002	
TC/Art Unit:	3724	
Examiner :	Isaac N. Hamilton	
Docket No. :	A1-1431	
Customer No. :	27127	

Attention: Examiner Hamilton

PROPOSED CLAIM AMENDMENTS

This communication presents the claim amendments that I am proposing in response to our conversation of yesterday, December 9. Please consider these amendments and advise whether they are sufficient to gain allowance of the claims, or otherwise indicate in what way they are unacceptable. Again, the basis for the proposed amendments is that method claim 32, as previously presented in the amendment filed August 6 (Paper No. 8), requires a product (32) passing through a passage (50) while a force is applied that (a) "[is] sufficient to push the product within the passage away from the second portion of the vertical passage and toward the wall portion of the vertical passage" and (b) "*maintain[s] the product in contact with the splines during engagement with the cutting means.*" (Emphasis added.)

Application No. 10/072,494
Docket No. A1-1431
Communication dated December 10, 2003

From the specification, you can appreciate that a key aspect of the invention is maintaining contact between the product 32 and the guide means (splines) 46 located in the passage 50 opposite the force-applying means (jets) 52. I believe this process-related aspect of the invention is also a proper limitation for the apparatus claims 1-20, since the limitation is specified in independent apparatus claim 1 as a "function" of the "means" in the means-plus-function clause "means for applying a force."

In view of the above, I hope you agree that the amendments operate to distinguish our invention from the prior art without raising new issues.